DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 324 736 CS 507 319

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TITLE Developing Undergraduate Oral Communication Competency: The Center for Excellence in Oral Communication.
PUB DATE Nov 90
NOTE 42p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (76th, Chicago, IL, November 1-4, 1990).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Communication Skills; Higher Education; Needs Assessment; *Program Development; Program Implementation; *Speech Communication; Undergraduate Students
IDENTIFIERS *Communication Competencies; *Speech Communication Education; University of Colorado Colorado Springs

ABSTRACT

Considering the acknowledged importance of oral communication competency and the intense interest of communication scholars in terms of its definition, conceptualization, and assessment, a need now exists to systematically apply the communication competency construct to instruction of the university undergraduate. This paper outlines the theoretical framework and formative steps guiding the establishment of the Center for Excellence in Oral Communication at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs. Funded as a part of a two million dollar Title III Strengthening Institutions grant project, the new Center's academic programs began in fall semester, 1990. The Center's primary goals are to develop, deliver, and assess academic programs related to the enhancement of the oral communication competence of undergraduate students. Included in the discussion is a description of the theoretical underpinnings and methodological approaches taken by the Center to needs assessment, program development, and instrument development. Underlying all of these academic efforts are the insights and concepts regarding communication competency that have evolved within the communication discipline over the last 20 years. (Four tables of data are included, and 35 references are attached. Appendixes include: faculty needs assessment survey instrument, student needs assessment questionnaire, speech and thought curriculum course objectives and criteria, "The Competent Speaker" evaluation form, and "The Competent Speaker" evaluation criteria.)
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ED324736

Developing Undergraduate Oral Communication Competency: The Center for Excellence in Oral Communication.*

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A Paper Presented to the

Annual Convention

of the

Speech Communication Association

Instructional Development Division

November 1-4, 1990

Chicago, Illinois

CS507315

*The support and commitment of the graduate teaching staff in developing the programs for the Center for Excellence in Oral Communication is gratefully acknowledged: Marta Bakke, Ferris Hoover, Ruth Johnson, Meg Kendall, Janice Naylor, Barbara Ver Steeg, Penny Whitney, and Beth Zautke.

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CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE IN ORAL COMMUNICATION

Abstract

Considering the acknowledged importance of oral communication competency and the intense interest of communication scholars in terms of its definition, conceptualization, and assessment, a need now exists to systematically apply the communication competency construct to instruction of the university undergraduate. This paper will outline the theoretical framework and formative steps guiding the establishment of the Center for Excellence in Oral Communication at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs. Funded as a part of a two million dollar Title III Strengthening Institutions grant project, the new Center's academic programs began in fall semester,1990. The Center's primary goals are to develop, deliver, and assess academic programs related to the enhancement of the oral communication competence of undergraduate students. Included in the present discussion of the Center's goals and implementation strategies is a description of the theoretical underpinnings and methodological approaches taken to needs assessment, program development and instrument development. Underlying all of these academic efforts are the insights and concepts regarding communication competency that have evolved within the communication discipline over the last 20 years.

I. INTRODUCTION TO A COMMUNICATION-COMPETENCY FOCUSED ACADEMIC PROGRAM

Communication competency is of critical concern in a competitive, global community which has become increasingly information dependent. Ours is a time of great challenge, and yet the quality of educational preparation to compete in an information age may be somewhat insufficient in relation to basic communication competencies. Many 17 year-olds in the United States do not possess "high order" intellectual skills and 80% are unable to write a persuasive essay (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1984). The National Assessment of Educational Progress found that 20% of an 18-25 year-old sample performed poorly on basic speaking tasks involving sequential information (Vangelisti and Daly, 1989).

Further, recent research specifically relates oral competency to academic and professional success and points to the importance of oral competency for college and university students (Curtis, Winsor, & Stephens, 1989; Rubin & Graham, 1988; Rubin, Graham & Mignerey, 1990). Students who acquire skills in oral communication may be better prepared to compete in the classroom and in the business or professional arena. "In this information age the key to excellence is effective communication" (Shockley-Zalabak, 1988, p. 7).

In current literature, effective communication, more aptly communication competence, has been varyingly conceptualized and

defined by an array of communication scholars. The term, or concept, communication competence, has been used in reference to a variety of phenomena, including

> (1) knowledge possessed by a social actor; (2) abilities possessed by a social actor; (3) behaviors emitted by a social actor; (4) impressions or attributions made about a social actor; and (5) quality of the overall interaction process, including the numerous interrelated components (e.g., knowledge, motivation, skill, context, outcomes). (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989, p. 6)

Other authors, as well as national conferences within the communication discipline, have addressed the conceptualization, definition, and assessment of competence (Backlund, et al.,1990; Jabusch & Littlejohn, 1981;Littlejohn & Jabusch, 1982; McCroskey, 1982;Pearson & Daniels, 1988; Phillips, 1983; Rubin & Henzel, 1984;Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989; Spitzberg & Hecht, 1984; Weimann, 1977; Weimann & Backlund, 1980). Since competence, as an academic construct, has been adequately debated elsewhere, it is not within the scope of this paper to investigate the issues surrounding defining or conceptualizing oral communication competence. Rather, this paper will present an academic approach to the development of communication competency, a new undergraduate program specifically focused on enriching the competencies of undergraduate university students.

The quantity and quality of academic scholarship and inquiry focusing on the communication competency paradigm is vast and

thoughtful; as such, it would appear to be a construct or "idea whose time has come.", in terms of systematic application. As such, the new academic programs being developed by the Center for Excellence in Oral Communication are driven by the vast emergent body of literature regarding the communication competency paradigm.

Specifically, the present paper will provide an overview of the genesis phase of the Center of Excellence in Oral Communication. First, a brief explanation will be offered of the relationship of the new program to the university and its long range goals. Then, rationale for the program's academic approach and program goals are outlined. Next, the implementation strategies that are being utilized to bring the program goals to fruition are reviewed. The paper concludes with a discussion of future directions for research and program development that may be taken on behalf of a greater understanding of communication competency and its instruction in an academic setting.

II. THE CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE IN ORAL COMMUNICATION

A. Relationship to Project EXCEL and Campus-wide Goals

Acknowledging the challenges facing undergraduate education, the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs (UCCS) initiated a system-wide strategic planning program in 1988 which set forth goals to guide institutional decisions into the 21st century (University of Colorado, 1989). Two critical priorities which helped to guide the delineation of goals were: first, to achieve excellence in undergraduate education by improving all students'

critical skills across the curriculum; second, to improve academic programs related to greater retention of those students who presently leave UCCS before graduation. To assist in achieving these goals, a committee representing the breadth of the university academic community was formed to develop and write a proposal which would focus on assuring excellence and retention in undergraduate education. The proposal generated by the committee resulted in the successful award of a two million dollar Title III Strengthening Institutions grant, funded by the U. S. Office of Education over a five year period (Project EXCEL, 1990).

The Title III grant is enabling UCCS to implement both the excellence and retention components of the UCCS' Strategic Plan by establishing a new program, Project EXCEL. Project EXCEL is a campus-wide program that ultimately will facilitate the creation of five new and innovative centers for academic excellence, academic learning centers focusing on writing, oral communication, mathematics, natural sciences, and foreign language and culture.

In addition to the five academic learning centers, there are two additional components pivotal to the success of Project EXCEL. The first of these is an Early Warning System, a computer software program which has the capability of identifying students who may be having academic difficulty, before their problems lead to failure or departure from the university. The second pivotal component is the University Learning Center which provides coordinated testing, evaluation, advising, and referral of students to the five academic centers.

The Center for Excellence in Oral Communication is one of Project EXCEL's five academic centers; its programs are being developed under the auspices and direction of the UCCS Communication Department. The academic programs and services to students provided by the new Center focus on both excellence and retention by developing and enhancing the oral communication competencies of all undergraduate students.

This paper now will review rationale for the academic approaches of the programs being developed by the Center for Excellence in Oral Communication.

B. Rationale for Academic Approaches

Rationale for the Center's focus on communication competency development and its speech and thought approach may be provided by a brief examination of research and theory in these two areas.

Research has consistently related oral competency and communication training and development to academic and professional success (Curtis, Winsor, & Stephens, 1989; Rubin & Graham, 1988; Rubin, Graham, & Mignerey, 1990). The Center for Excellence in Oral Communication will provide UCCS undergraduate students assistance and programs in assessing and developing their oral competencies; and the Speech and Thought Curriculum will assist in developing the ability to communicate organized thoughts through speech.

Theoretically, Vygotsky suggests that educated people must be orally competent, not simply because oral competency is necessary for success in the professional world but, more fundamentally,

because improved oral competency develops intellectual and reasoning abilities (1986). That is, higher thought processes are contingent upon language, which enables human beings to think and communicate at a conceptual level. Thus improving students' oral competency goes beyond improving just public speaking performance and oral skills. Additionally, it improves the ability to think in an organized and logical way, necessary for higher order reasoning and communicating ideas to others in spoken language (Vygotsky, 1986).

In addition to the research and theory which underscores the importance of oral competency and the ability to organize speech and thought, rationale for the instructional approach being taken by the Center for Excellence in Oral Communication can be provided. That rationale is derived from the Center's utilization of an individual instructional model combined with a lecture-recitation format, which provides at least three advantages to the student. First, the format of the program is advantageous because it allows for greater standardization of course objectives, content, and materials (Gray, 1989) across lecture and recitation sections. Lecture sections, taught by communication faculty, provide the student a cognitive framework for understanding the role that internal thought plays in external performance. Second, more individualized instruction and highly personalized relationships are possible by utilizing graduate teaching assistants in recitation sections and in the Individualized Assistance Laboratory (Seiler and Fuss-Reineck, 1986). Finally, the third advantage of

the instructional approach of the Center for Excellence in Oral Communication is its varied use of an Individualized Assistance Laboratory. This facility is available to students enrolled in the Speech and Thought Curriculum and to students who are referred to the Center through a campus-wide oral competency diagnostic and assessment program. Studies by Mulac (1974) and Miles (1981) support the benefit of individualized assistance and feedback in a laboratory setting.

Based on the theoretical foundation and instructional approach just reviewed,general and specific program goals for the Center for Excellence in Oral Communication can be articulated.

C. Program Goals

The general goal for the Center for Excellence in Oral Communication is to enhance and develop the oral communication competence of the undergraduate student population of the university. That goal is being accomplished by providing instruction and intervention that contributes to excellence in communication and has a positive impact on student retention. Specific goals for the Center include developing and delivering to UCCS undergraduates the following academic components:

- A campus-wide oral communication competency diagnostic and assessment program;
- A Speech and Thought Curriculum utilizing an individualized instructional model with a state-of-the-art video laboratory to replace the traditional classroom approach to platform speech;

- Individualized assistance programs available in a laboratory setting to all UCCS undergraduate students who request support or who are referred by the diagnostic and assessment program;
- An individualized assistance laboratory equipped with state-of-the-art audio, video, and presentational equipment;
- Two audio and video equipped Speech and Thought classrooms to include a computerized speech criticism process.
- A Speech and Thought oral communication component for a campus-wide core curriculum.

The Speech and Thought Curriculum and the Individualized Assistance Programs are being developed based upon an extensive campus-wide needs assessment and survey of both faculty and students. Additionally, students participating in the Speech and Thought Curriculum, the Individualized Assistance Programs, and the Individualized Assistance Laboratory engage in pre- and post-assessment of their oral communication competencies.

The discussion which follows outlines the implementation strategies now in place that are designed to achieve the Center's specific program goals.

III. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES FOR PROGRAM GOALS

Implementation strategies for the Center for Excellence in Oral Communication include an array of processes and academic programs:

A. A needs assessment survey of faculty, staff, and students

B. A program development plan subsuming

(1) The Speech and Thought Curriculum

(2) Individualized Assistance Laboratory

(3) The Individualized Assistance Laboratory

(4) A Graduate Teaching Assistant Program

(5) Communication Competency Across The Curriculum

C. An Oral Communication Competency Diagnostic and Assessment Program

A. Needs Assessment Survey of Faculty, Staff, and Students

In order to successfully meet the goals of the Center for Excellence in Oral Communication, it was first necessary to develop a needs assessment strategy to identify the most problematic communication situations facing undergraduate students at UCCS. Once the students' communication needs were identified, then appropriate communication programs and assessment instrumentation could be developed in relation to those needs.

The needs assessment strategy identified two distinct groups as potential information sources: faculty and student support staff, and students, both minority and non-minority, in need of academic support. A cross-sectional survey instrument was designed for use with the faculty/student support staff (see Appendix A) (Smith, 1988). A focus group approach and interpersonal interviewing were determined to be the most effective methods for gathering student data (see Appendix B (Lederman, 1990).

The cross-sectional survey format, used to assess faculty and staff perceptions of students' communication patterns and problems,

was chosen because of the efficient manner in which a single sample is surveyed for the purpose of inferring a conclusion (Smith, 1988). Using a stratified sampling procedure, faculty representing all departments and faculty representing all departments and schools at the university were identified as the sampling frame. Additionally, student support staff persons were included in the sample.

The survey instrument contained: 1) factual-demographic questions; 2) closed question evaluation of student communication competencies using a Likert five-point scale; 3) categorical ranking of students' competencies, and 4) open-ended questions (see Appendix A).

A total of 32 individual interviews were conducted, ranging in length from 45 minutes to 1 1/2 hours. The survey instrument was filled out during the interview and was used as a tool to guide discussion. Data from the faculty/staff survey and interview process are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

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Insert Table 1 About Here

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As Table 1 indicates, competencies related to organizing and expressing ideas are ranked as most in need of academic support. Competencies related to verbal and nonverbal appropriateness were ranked least in need. These quantitative findings regarding the importance of expressing ideas in an organized manner also were

supported by the qualitative analysis of data from faculty and support staff outlined in Table 2.

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Insert Table 2 About Here

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As Table 2 indicates, faculty and staff describe the ideal student as one who is capable of organized expression of complete thoughts, good presentation skills, classroom assertiveness, etc. In sum, both the quantitative and qualitative responses to the faculty/student support staff survey indicate a primary concern and need for development of communication competencies related to the oral presentation of organized thought.

Simultaneous with the cross-sectional survey of faculty and support staff, focus group and personal interviews were utilized to assess students' perceptions of communication problems and needs (Lederman, 1990). The purpose of the focus group and personal interview process was to seek qualitative and in depth data that would reveal patterns of students'viewpoints, attitudes, and feelings regarding communication. Using a random sampling procedure, students representing both the non-minority and minority populations of the university were selected as the sample population. A total of 59 interviews, 40 with non-minority and 19 with minority students were conducted. A Communication Department faculty person, experienced in group process and management, acted as facilitator of the student focus groups. All subjects, in the focus groups and interviews, filled out a subject questionnaire

designed to assess their perceptions of problematic communication situations (see Appendix B). Data from the student's focus group and interview process are presented in Tables 3 & 4.

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Insert Table 3 About Here

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As Table 3 indicates, both non-minority and minority students identified presentation skills as their most problematic communication situation. Interestingly, both samples of students identified the same seven communication situations as problematic, but the two sample populations varied in the order in which they ranked the seven problems.

The students also were asked to describe or give examples of the seven problematic communication situations they had identified. Table 4 presents the student's descriptions and examples of the seven communication problems.

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Insert Table 4 About Here

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The findings presented in the preceding tables regarding the needs assessment and surveys and interviews of faculty, staff, and students were submitted to thematic analysis using a constant comparative method of data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Additionally appropriate inter-rater reliability tests were applied to assess the reliability with which trained coders utilized thematical analysis in the qualitative analysis and identification

of problematic communication situations (Krippendorf, 1980). Then the results of that data analysis process were used to develop pilot academic programs and communication competency assessment instruments for the Center for Excellence in Oral Communication and the Individualized Assistance Laboratory.

B. Program Development

Pilot academic programs for the Center are grounded in the needs assessment findings and are driven by the oral communication competency academic construct. These pilot programs include:

- The Speech and Thought Curriculum, a course offering, different from the basic or public speaking course in terms of its focus on developing communication competency and the expression of organized thought;
- Individualized Assistance programs, addressing student's identified communication problems and concerns, using multi-modal instructional approaches such as interactive video, interpersonal coaching and assistance, small group discussions/meetings, and experiential workshops; and
- An Individualized Assistance Laboratory and audio and video equipped classrooms.

(1) The Speech and Thought Curriculum

The primary goal of the Speech and Thought Curriculum is to develop the oral communication competency of undergraduates through a course offering which focuses on the cognitive, behavioral, affective, and ethical domains of communication.

A review of the literature on communication competency suggests that a composite model of competence appropriately should include these four properties or domains:

- a cognitive dimension/domain subsuming knowledge and understanding of the communication process and the elements involved in a communication event;
- a behavioral dimension/domain subsuming both abilities possessed by the communicator and skills or behaviors emitted or observed;
- an affective dimension/domain subsuming the communicator's feelings, attitudes, motivation, and willingness to communicate; and
- an ethical dimension/domain subsuming the communicator's ability and willingness to take moral responsibility for the outcome of the communication event and the impact on the communicators.

The Speech and Thought Curriculum was developed based on the student's achievement in each of the identified four domains of communication competence. Specific course objectives and criteria for assessment in each domain have been articulated (see Appendix C).

In regard to the assessment and evaluation of competence in the Speech and Thought Curriculum, the students participate in both an entrance (pre-) and exit (post-) interview. The Communication Competency Assessment Instrument (Rubin, 1982) and the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (McCroskey, 1970) are pre- and

post- administered; and the student establishes and then reviews a set of competency goals for the Curriculum. Additionally, each speaking performance of the student is evaluated using a speech evaluation form, "The Competent Speaker", designed for the Curriculum and grounded in the communication competency literature. (see Appendix D). Also, for the student to achieve in the four articulated domains of communication competency, a focus on speech and thought is in order. The interrelatedness of speech and thought is examined, both theoretically and practically, in the Curriculum. The student engages in the thought process itself, organizing and outlining prior to speaking, and learning how to speak in a more organized and logical manner. THe intent is that the student develop the ability to communicate ideas clearly, concisely and with organization, as called for in the needs assessment findings.

In addition to attending weekly lectures (cognitive domain) and recitation sections (behavioral domain), all sstudents enrolled in the Speech and Thought Curriculum have access to, and are required to utilize the Individualized Assistance Laboratory and its video equipment to review their speaking performances (affective domain).

(2) Individualized Assistance Programs

The goal of the individualized assistance programs is to speak to the development of undergraduate communication competencies in a series of more varied instructional modules than provided by the Speech and Thought Curriculum. In the needs assessment process,

faculty, staff, and students identified an array of communication needs, problems and concerns. Careful analysis of the needs assessment data suggest that multi-modal instructional approaches were called for to speak to the variety of communication issues and problematic situations identified.

Those communication issues and situations include:

1. public presentational skills training
2. communication apprehension treatment
3. assertiveness (self-esteem) skills
4. interpersonal problem solving/conflict management
5. listening skills
6. interviewing skills
7. communicating in the classroom
8. communicating with administration and the system
9. critical thinking and competent communication

To address these communication concerns, a series of pilot instructional modules are being developed and tested:

1. Individualized assistance programs (IAPs) consisting of cognitive information, experiential exercises, and student assignments related to the particular communication problem. Presently pilot programs are available focusing on public presentation, communication apprehension, assertiveness, problem solving, listening, and interviewing. Interactive videos, related to each of the problems, are being developed.

2. Small group discussion/luncheon meetings are scheduled weekly which will focus on the psychologicaly related communication problems of communication apprehension, assertiveness, and interpersonal problem solving and conflict management.

3. Workshops including "Listening to Learn", focusing on listening in the classroom; "Scared Stiff", dealing with communication apprehension and anxiety; "Campus Communication", addressing communicating in the classroom, with professors, the system and administration, and with other (different) students; "Critical Thinking and Competent Communication", focusing on organizing messages for understanding, expressing ideas clearly and concisely, and expressing and defending opinions.

(3) The Individualized Assistance Laboratory

The Individualized Assistance Laboratory (IAL) is a physical facility housing the Center for Excellence in Oral Communication and designed to support the development of the communication competencies of all undergraduates.

Regarding the Speech and Thought Curriculum, the IAL utilizing videotape recording is being adopted because of its demonstrated success (Miles, 1981 & Mulac, 1974) in improving language usage and delivery. Its primary advantage is in allowing "us to see ourself as others see us" Dance and Zak-Dance, 1986, p. 244). Regarding the various Individualized Assistance Programs, the IAL provides

a quality learning environment and instructional advantages for students which are supportive and non-threatening.

The physical facilities and equipment for the Individualized Laboratory are designed to provide user-friendly ,but high quality, technical feedback, as well as privacy of interaction with students. Three assisted and two private viewing areas are available as well as three small presenting areas. Two video classrooms are equipped with an instructor console with controls for a built-in camera and playback monitor, a fixed microphone, lights adapted to camera requirements, and window treatments to control light. The Individualized Assistance Laboratory is adjacent to, but separate from, the two video classrooms. In addition to video equipment for private or assisted playback and presentations, the Individualized Assistance Laboratory contains office space, conference areas, tape storage cabinets, and micro-computers for scheduling, record-keeping, and computerized speech criticism. Graduate teaching assistants are trained to operate equipment, in both classrooms and laboratory, and to deliver programs to the undergraduate student population.

(4) Graduate Teaching Assistant Training Program

Communication Department faculty and Center staff developed a Graduate Teaching Assistant Training and Development Program which includes 36 hours of formal training divided into seven individual units. The underlying assumption of the training program is that the new Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) will have little, or no, prior teaching experience. Therefore, the overall

goal of the training program is to develop the requisite presentational skills and familiarity with the Center's programs to allow the GTA to become a role model of communication competency for the students. Specific objectives for each of the training units have been defined and are outlined in a training manual together with the rationale, time necessary for training tasks, focus areas, and resources provided for each unit of training. The seven units are:

Unit One - General Introduction and Orientation

Unit Two - Overview of the Center for Excellence in Oral Communication and the Speech and Thought Curriculum

Unit Three - Teaching Techniques and Processes

Unit Four - Grading/Evaluation in the Speech and Thought Curriculum

Unit Five - Techniques and Procedures for Student Feedback

Unit Six - Techniques and Procedures for Equipment Utilization

Unit Seven - Conclusions, Evaluations, and Moving Forward

(5) Developing Communication Competency Across the Curriculum

The Center for Excellence in Oral Communication intends to respond to a university mandate to improve oral communication competencies and related critical skills regarding organized thought for undergraduates across the curriculum. By 1992, a

Speech and Thought oral communication component will be integrated into the campus-wide curriculum. The goal is for all students, campus-wide, to communicate with precision, cogency, and force while achieving breadth and depth of understanding in their own fields of knowledge (University of Colorado, 1989). In that regard, Center faculty are presently researching and participating in conferences within and external to the communication discipline that involve skills across the curriculum (Fairchild, et al, 1990).

C. Oral Communication Competency Diagnostic and Assessment Program

The development of accurate assessment methods is critical to instructional and interventional communication program design (McCroskey, 1982), and necessary as a measurement of program efficay. A panel report to the National Commission on Excellence in Education stated that creative uses of assessment are keys to helping college faculty and administrators improve the quality of higher education and to clarify the meaning of college degrees (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1984).

The Center for Excellence in Oral Communication is developing a comprehensive assessment program addressing issues pertinent to students enrolled in the Speech and Thought Curriculum, as well as issues distinct to students in need of individualized assistance and academic support. The assessment programs are pivotal to tracking improvement of the Speech and Thought Curriculum students and the students in need of support who participate in any of the Individualized Assistance Laboratory programs. The Center is

developing its own program of assessment, sensitive to context and free from any known bias, while adhering to the principles of validity, reliability, and fairness (McCroskey, 1982).

Realizing the very critical nature of an appropriate communication assessment program, a literature review was conducted examining issues relevant to oral communication competency assessment and existing assessment methods and instruments. After an extensive search of literature, Communication Department faculty consulted with national experts in the oral communication competency field to provide background for selection, and/or development of the instrument, or instruments, to meet the needs of the Center's new programs.

The resultant pilot assessment program includes the use of existing instruments for the Speech and Thought Curriculum as well as the development of two new instruments designed particularly for the Center and its programs.

Speech and Thought Curriculum pre- and post-assessment includes use of the Communication Competency Assessment Instrument, The CCAI, (Rubin, 1982) and the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension, the PRCA, (McCroskey, 1970). After careful examination of an array of other assessment tools, these two instruments in companionship with each other, appeared most appropriate for the Curriculum program. Despite the length of time for administration, the CCAI appears to assess critical dimensions of communication competency with reliabilty and validity (Spitzberg, B.H., 1988). Regarding assessment in the Speech and

Thought Curriculum of actual speaking performances, a competency-based speech evaluation form has been developed and a pilot of it is being tested on several university campuses (See Appendix D). Members of a subcommittee of SCA's Committee on Assessment and Testing developed the initial prototype of "The Competent Speaker" evaluation form. The prototype includes eight public speaking competencies and attendent criteria for their assessment (See Appendix E) (Morreale et al., 1990).

Pre- and post-assessment in the Individual Assistance Laboratory and Programs also is involving an instrument development process. Since some concern exists regarding the appropriateness of existing instruments for students in need of assistance and academic support, a pilot assessment tool is being developed for this special population. Students referred to the Center for individualized assistance will be tested using a pilot of The Communication Behaviors Instrument for Students at Risk (CBI-SAR). That instrument presently is being developed, under the direction of Dr. Donald D. Morley of the UCCS Communication Department, using the four-step behavioral analytical method for developing communication assessment tools (Goldfried & D'Zurilla, 1969). In addition to the CBI-SAR, the students in need of assistance also complete the PRCA (McCroskey, 1970).

IV. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The Center for Excellence in Oral Communication, with its Title III funding base, has the potential to positively impact the oral communication competencies of all undergraduates at the

University of Colorado at Colorado Springs. The potential impact is enhanced by the approach taken in planning and implementing the Center's new academic programs. First, a campus-wide assessment of student's needs related to oral communication competencies was undertaken. That assessment has been critical in developing programs, measurement instruments, and multi-modal instructional models to meet the very specific communication needs of undergraduate students. Second, all academic programs and oral communication competency assessment instruments are being firmly grounded in the competency literature articulated by communication scholars over the last two decades. Finally, The Speech and Thought Curriculum approach, with the Individualized Assistance Laboratory and Individualized Assistance Programs, available to all undergraduate students, are being developed to maximize the Center's future ability to improve oral communication competencies across students' academic careers.

More specifically, future directions for program development by the Center include:

- refining the individual assistance and other pilot academic programs based on students' response and a more clearly articulated model of communication competency;
- refining the pilot oral communication competency assessment instruments and programs based on tests for their reliability and validity;

- refining the pilot communication-competency-based speech evaluation forms based on testing of the forms on a variety of campuses and in a variety of programs;
- developing a computerized speech criticism system to accompany the competency-based speech evaluation forms.

Looking beyond these future plans for the undergraduate program at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, the Center for Excellence in Oral Communication also anticipates working with the broader communication discipline as well. Knowledge gained from the Center's programs hopefully will contribute to disciplinary understanding of comunication competency in several key areas. An initial contribution would be the definition of problematic communication situations facing university students. Next it is expected that data and observations generated by the Speech and Thought curriculum will make it possible to understand more definitively the role of critical thinking and overall academic performance. A further possibility of shared scholarship exists with the exchange of curriculum ideas for incorporating oral communication competencies across a variety of disciplines. Finally, the Center anticipates participating in clearer articulation of both definition and theory regarding oral communication competency and its assessment.

Theorists and scholars writing in the academic arena of oral communication competency frequently reference a "huge and fragmented literature," which is "largely a result of numerous conceptual and methodological frameworks" (Spitzberg and Cupach,

1989, p. 2). The intention of the Center for Excellence in Oral Communication is not just to expand this referenced literature with yet more concepts and methodologies. Rather, the Center intends to use its efforts and new programs to help develop greater understanding of the pivotal role that oral communication competency plays in the academic, professional, and personal success of all university undergraduates.

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VI. APPENDIX

A. Faculty Needs Assessment Survey Instrument.

B. Student Needs Assessment Questionnaire.

C. Speech and Thought Curriculum Course Objectives and Criteria.

D. "The Competent Speaker" Evaluation Form.

E. "The Competent Speaker" Evaluation Criteria.

Table 1

Quantitative Analysis of Faculty Perceptions of Students' Communication Competencies

N=32

Rank Ordering of Skills and Competencies in need of academic support		Percentage of respondents who agree and strongly agree that students need to improve on this skill/competency
1.	Expressing ideas clearly	90.6
2.	Organizing messages so that others can understand them	84.4
3.	Expressing ideas concisely	84.4
4.	Expressing and defending point of view with evidence	81.3
5.	The effective use of speaking voice	81.3
6.	Degree of communication apprehension or anxiety	80.0
7.	Listening effectively	78.1
8.	Communication and social skills related to the classroom	70.9
9.	Asking effective questions	65.6
10.	Giving complete answers to questions	62.6
11.	The appropriate use of words, pronunciation and grammar	59.4
12.	The appropriate use of nonverbal communication and body language	40.7

Note: Items utilized to represent student's competencies were derived from the Communication Competency Assessment Instrument (Rubin, 1982).

Table 2

Qualitative Analysis of Faculty Perceptions of Communication Competencies

(Open Ended Questions and Rank-Ordered Responses)
Total N=32

1. In terms of oral communication skills and competencies, describe the ideal student. (N=31)

Organized expression of complete thoughts.	19
Good presentation skills.	14
Classroom assertiveness/participation.	12
Ability to request help.	10
Appropriate use of English language.	10
Ability to synthesize information.	8

2. In terms of communication, what particular communication related student skills, in or out of the classroom are problematic? (N=30)

Identifying/solving problems.	11
Listening skills.	8
Critical thinking.	7
Presentation skills.	7
Communication apprehension.	6
Lack of classroom assertiveness.	5

3. Describe the types of assistance or programs, not now provided, you like available to students in the area of communication skills and competencies. (N=22)

Assistance in preparing presentations.	5
Individualized assistance.	2
Small group work.	2
Video lab.	2
Interviewing skills.	2

4A. During a regular semester, how many students might you refer for assistance in the area of oral communication skills and competencies? (N=26)

1-4	5
5-10	3
11-15	3
16+	2

4B. For what type of assistance might you refer the students? (N=26)

Apprehension reduction.
Presentation rehearsal.
Entire freshman class for analytical skills.
Faculty to improve lectures and boost self-esteem.
Students with annoying speech patterns.
Would not refer due to possible stigma.

(No multiple answers received)

5. Other comments. (N=27)

Faculty training opportunities needed.
Label programs as improvement rather than remedial/corrective.
Stress non-verbal aspects of presentation skills.
Training to improve precise language usage.
Workshops on interviewing skills and presentation skills.
Development of critical thinking skills needed across all curricula.
Various cultural and physically challenged related workshops/courses.
General interpersonal communication skill improvement workshops.
Across campus presentations on CEOC offerings.
New programs in forensics.

(No multiple answers received)

Table 3

Qualitative Analysis of Students' Perceptions of Communication Problems

A. Non-Minority Students (N=40)

Rank Ordering of Problems	Frequency of mention
Presentation Skills Students expressed difficulty in approaching professors with questions and problems	29
Interpersonal Problem Solving Students expressed difficulties concerning interpersonal problem-solving situations with others such as spouse, supervisor, friends, etc.	19
Communication with System and/or Administration Students articulated difficulties in dealing with the administration and inaccessibility of advising	17
Lack of Assertiveness Students indicated anxiety concerning interpersonal problem-solving as well as confrontational situations	14
Lack of Self-Esteem Students expressed concern regarding a fear of rejection	14
Communication with Others Unlike Self Students expressed difficulty communicating with others who are different in regard to age, race, sex, or lifestyle	13

(Table 3 continued)

B. Minority Students (N=19)

Problem	Frequency of Mention
Presentation Skills	18
Lack of Assertiveness	11
Communication with System and/or Administration	11
Communication with Professors	10
Lack of Self-Esteem	8
Interpersonal Problem Solving	7
Communication with Others Unlike Self	3

Table 4

SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS

PROBLEMATIC SITUATIONS AND EXAMPLES OF THOSE SITUATIONS

I. Public Speaking/Presentation Skills

Students expressed a fear of speaking in front of large groups.

A. Pulling together thoughts and ideas and preparing material for a speech.

B. Instilling self-confidence and therefore presenting a better speech.

C. Controlling anxiety during the beginning moments of a speech as the topic is introduced to the audience.

D. Physiological changes associated with the anxiety induced by speaking in front of large groups (i.e., feeling faint, shaky knees, shortness of breath).

II. Communication with Others Unlike Self

Students expressed difficulty communicating with others who were unlike themselves with regard to age, race, sex, or lifestyle.

A. Feelings of a lack of belongingness and isolation from others on a commuter campus

B. Communication with persons who are different in age, gender, ethnicity, or lifestyle.

C. Establishing a rapport with individuals of an unfamiliar culture and unbecoming cultural and language barriers.

III. Lack of Assertiveness

Students indicated anxiety concerning interpersonal problem-solving as well as confrontational situations.

A. Inability to disagree in class discussion.

B. Communicating about pals in small work groups.

C. Approaching unknown others and striking up conversations in party settings.

IV. Lack of Self-Esteem

Students expressed concern regarding a fear of rejection.

A. Introduction of self on the first day of class.

B. Taking the first steps to apply for a desired job.

C. Taking on leadership roles in small work groups.

V. Communication with Professors

Students expressed difficulty in approaching professors with questions and problems.

A. Asking questions regarding material covered in class.

B. Approaching professors to question a grade on paper or test.

C. Approaching professor for assistance in a class in which you are experiencing difficulty.

D. Asking a question a second time when you are not satisfied with the first answer to the question.

E. Availability of professors - office hours, etc.

VI. Communication with System/Administration

Students articulated difficulties in dealing with the administration and inaccessibility of advising.

A. Communicating assertively with staff and personnel on the campus regarding problematic situations.

B. Acknowledging errors or points of confusion with staff and personnel.

C. Communicating assertively with faculty and staff in order to satisfy personal/academic needs.

D. Inaccurate and lack of information from advising and financial aid.

VII. Interpersonal Problem Solving

Students expressed difficulties concerning interpersonal problem solving situations with others such as spouse, supervisor, friends, etc. Students also indicated they were ill-equipped to handle confrontational situations.

A. Inability to handle interpersonal conflict with significant others.

B. Conflict management problems with family, friends.

C. Being honest and direct, but tactful at the same time.

D. Maintaining objectivity when working with someone you don't like.